AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

1. (Canceled)

2. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, which satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \leqq L/D \leqq 50 \qquad (2)$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μm) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

3. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Withdrawn) A method for producing a dry-process nonwoven fabric, which comprises:

applying a water jet of 30 kg/cm^2 or more to a web that contains the fibers of claim 23, or

needle-punching the web to a punching density of at least 250 kg/cm^2 to thereby fibrillate the fibers.

6. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \leqq L/D \leqq 50 \qquad (2)$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μm) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

7. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Previously Presented) A dry-process nonwoven fabric obtained according to the method of claim 5.

10. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 9, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \leqq L/D \leqq 50 \qquad (2)$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μm) of the fibers which is a mean length (μm) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

11. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 9, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.

12. (Canceled)

13. (Withdrawn) A method for producing a wet-process water-jet nonwoven fabric, which comprises:

applying a water jet of 30 kg/cm^2 or more to base paper prepared from a slurry that contains the fibers of claim 23 as a part of the fibrous component thereof, to thereby fibrillate the fibers.

14. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \leqq L/D \leqq 50 \qquad (2)$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μm) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

15. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Previously Presented) A wet-process nonwoven fabric obtained according to the method of claim 13.

18. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 17, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \leqq L/D \leqq 50 \qquad (2)$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μm) of the fibers which is a mean length (μm) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

19. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 17, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.

20. (Canceled)

21. (Canceled)

22. (Canceled)

23. (Currently Amended) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers having an extremely flattened cross-sectional profile and having a mean thickness D (μm) that satisfies the following formula (1):

$$0.4 \leqq D \leqq 5 \qquad (1),$$

wherein

D = S/L;

D indicates the mean thickness (μm) of the fibers which is a mean length (μm) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers;

S indicates the cross-section area (μm^2) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers;

wherein said polyvinyl alcohol fibers consist of polyvinyl alcohol and from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μm.

24. (Currently Amended) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers having an extremely thinly flattened cross-sectional profile and having a mean thickness D (μm) that satisfies the following formula (1):

$$0.4 \leqq D \leqq 5 \qquad (1),$$

wherein

D = S/L;

D indicates the mean thickness (μm) of the fibers which is a mean length (μm) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers;

S indicates the cross-section area (μm^2) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers;

wherein said polyvinyl alcohol fibers consist of polyvinyl alcohol and from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μm.

25-26. (Canceled)

27. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, which satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \leqq L/D \leqq 50 \qquad (2)$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μm) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μm) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

28. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.

29. (Canceled)

30. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.

31. (Canceled)

32. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, wherein said fibers have a water-absorbing speed of 123-128 mm/5min.

33. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, wherein when said fibers are used to wipe off a transparent acrylic plate spotted with Indian ink, a residue after wiping is 3.1 to 5.0%.

34. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein said fibers have a water-absorbing speed of 123-128 mm/5min.

35. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein when said fibers are used to wipe off a transparent acrylic plate spotted with Indian ink, a residue after wiping is 3.1 to 5.0%.

36. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 23, wherein said layered compound is smectite, montmorillonite or mica.

37. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein said layered compound is smectite, montmorillonite or mica.